

**ANG****Bayan**

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Editorial

Resist the terrorism of the US-Arroyo regime!

State violence has intensified against leaders of patriotic and democratic people's organizations, indicating the intensity of the crisis of the ruling system and the Arroyo regime's worsening political desperation.

From January to March, 26 officials of Bayan Muna and other progressive organizations in various provinces nationwide have been killed, 18 of them in the last two weeks. These killings are meant to instill fear and silence an angry people.

All of the victims were known advocates of the people's interests and various people's struggles. Among them were Councilor Abelardo Ladera and Fr. William Tadena, staunch supporters of the just strike launched by mill and farm workers in Hacienda Luisita; and Atty. Felidito Dacut who battled against heinous cases of military violence in Eastern Visayas.

They represented the impoverished people's thorough loathing for the US-Arroyo regime and led efforts to demand just wages and genuine land reform, fought against military abuses, opposed relentless increases in the prices of oil and other basic goods and services, opposed new tax burdens and called for the ouster of Gloria Arroyo from power. Thus the regime's ruthless response.

Contrary to Arroyo's expectations, the mounting cases of armed suppression against progressive and militant organizations have elicited greater sympathy



and support from the middle forces, such as church people, media workers, teachers, government officials at the local and national levels and even forces overseas. The people have not been cowed, but are outraged and cry out for justice.

Only the fascist and reactionary armed forces and US military assistance and intervention have been propping up the extremely isolated Arroyo regime.

The regime's violent response to the people's resistance further highlights the justness of their demands and struggles. The people must show the connection between their struggles against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism and their demand to overthrow the onerous Arroyo regime with the latter's intensifying fascist attacks against the people.

It is likewise crucial for the people to grasp an important lesson taught by the Arroyo regime: that the ruling classes will never of their own accord relin-

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quish their privileges to give even the slightest and most immediate relief to the poor. The people, in advancing their struggles, will have to face even greater hardships and sacrifice. They must make a stand and do so with ever greater courage and militancy.

It is correct for militant and progressive organizations to persevere in asserting their civil liberties and political rights as well as their right to struggle for their demands through legal means in the face of the Arroyo regime's moves toward open fascist rule, and especially its drive to have the Anti-Terrorism Bill enacted.

Their sturdiest shield is the correctness of their struggle and the people's organized strength. A broad anti-fascist united front similar to that which brought down the Marcos dictatorship may emerge from this struggle.

There is an even more important lesson being taught by the Arroyo regime: that only revolutionary armed struggle can overthrow reactionary armed rule

and completely address the demands of the suffering people.

It is thus correct for the New People's Army (NPA) to intensify revolutionary armed struggle. As state terrorism holds sway, conditions become excellent for the acceleration of NPA recruitment and the intensification of tactical offensives against the state's armed minions.

The NPA must target in particular the fascist troops responsible for the killings and other abuses against the people. The people's army will launch such offensives within guerrilla zones to weaken the AFP and PNP's fascist forces and draw them away from centers of legal mass struggles.

Through the NPA's tactical offensives and other military actions, the Arroyo regime and its armed minions are slowly weakened, and justice meted on those responsible for inflicting fascist brutalities on the people. Every offensive, big or small, contributes to the overall objective of smashing the puppet and anti-people Arroyo regime.

AB

Chain of violence dogs leaders of the legal democratic movement

In their desire to stifle growing resistance from democratic and progressive forces, the regime and its military have perpetrated a series of systematic killings and harassment of leaders and members

of various mass organizations and parties. There have been 26 victims of fascist violence since January.


The latest victim was Victor Concepcion, Anakpawis party-list group coordinator and secretary

general of Aguman deng Maglala-tang Capampangan, a local organization of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas. He was shot in the evening of March 17 while resting in his house in Angeles City.

Prior to this, Joel Reyes, a tri-cycle driver and Anakpawis organizer from Jose Panganiban, Camarines Norte, was shot and killed on March 16. Anakpawis has assailed the 902nd IBde and the 31st IB, which it holds responsible for the killings.

On March 14, Atty. Felidito Dacut, 51, Bayan Muna-Eastern Visayas regional coordinator was killed in Tacloban City. Attorney Dacut was aboard a jeep when he was shot barely a kilometer from the Bayan Muna office. It may be recalled that Anakpawis regional coordinator Samuel Bandilla was also slain in Tacloban on October 15, 2004.

Meanwhile, Fr. William Tadena



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angbayan@yahoo.com

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was shot and killed on March 13 in Barangay Guevarra, La Paz, Tarlac, while two of his companions were seriously wounded. Fr. Tadena, 37, a priest of the Philippine Independent Church, was active in Bayan Muna and Anakpawis and a known supporter of the workers in Hacienda Luisita.

Earlier, another PIC priest, Fr. Allan Caparro and his wife Aileen were both shot and wounded on February 18 in Abuyog, Leyte. Fr. Caparro was the vice chairperson of the Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR) in Eastern Visayas.

On March 3, Tarlac City Councilor Abelardo Ladera, another Bayan Muna member and supporter of the workers in Hacienda Luisita, was also shot and killed.

Ernesto Bang was likewise gunned down in his house in Barangay Malangkaw Basud, Labo, Camarines Norte on March 10. He was the public information officer of the KMP's provincial chapter.

On March 9, Bayan Muna-Ilocos regional coordinator Romeo Sanchez was shot and killed in front of a market in Baguio City. Sanchez had just come from a conference opposing large-scale mining in the region.

On March 7, Philippine Army soldiers abducted Anakbayan-Zambales chairperson Mer Dizon. He is currently detained at the provincial jail in Iba.

Former BAYAN-Nueva Ecija secretary-general and current Bayan Muna provincial coordinator Danny Macapagal has been missing since he was picked up in front of his house in Cabanatuan City on March 3. Four other activists who were also abducted that day remain missing as well.

Earlier, four members of the Gabriela Women's Party were accosted by soldiers in Sampaloc, Quezon on March 1. Miralyn

Gamba, Leonila Manalo, Nancy Elle and Aileen Ramos were detained for several days at the PNP station in Sampaloc and accused of being members of the New People's Army (NPA).

In January and February, 12 activists were killed, five were picked up, and four were harassed by the police and the military in the provinces of Pampanga, Bataan, Nueva Ecija and Aurora.

On February 18, Pamalakaya-Bulacan vice president Roger Viray was abducted and killed in Masantol, Pampanga. That same day, Rodel Pelayo and Joey Abraham, both members of the Central Luzon Aeta Association (CLAA), were killed in Balanga, Bataan. Also on February 18, Renato Espino, a worker and Anakpawis coordinator was slain in Mexico, Pampanga. Bayan Muna coordinator Rodrigo Lampa was killed on February 16 in Guagua, Pampanga. It was also in Guagua that KMP members Nicanor Garcia and his son Noel were killed.

Among those summarily executed were Crispin Amazona, who was abducted on February 14 and later found dead in Dingalan, Aurora; and Felino Briones who was slain on January 25. Still missing is Esteban Pastor, who was picked up on February 11 in San Luis, Aurora.

Meanwhile, Atty. Romeo Capulong, lead counsel of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and ad litem judge at a United Nations special tribunal disclosed that an attempt was made on his life on March 7. Attorney Capulong also serves as chief legal consultant of the strikers in Hacienda Luisita.

According to his account, a van with two men aboard headed for his house in Nueva Ecija. The van suddenly left when guards providing security for Attorney Capulong were alerted. Before this, he said, persons pretending to be ambulant



vendors had been conducting surveillance on his house for days.

To the revolutionary movement and the people, it is the Arroyo regime that is clearly culpable for this latest series of violent attacks on prominent progressives.

The National Democratic Front negotiating panel has warned that it would call off negotiations with the US-Arroyo regime if it continues to endanger Attorney Capulong's life. Brazenly fascist officials of the regime have long been directing their ire at Capulong and other officials of progressive parties and organizations because of their support for the Hacienda Luisita strike.

A few weeks before the murder of Councilor Ladera, the AFP Northern Luzon Command (Nolcom) released a listing of alleged CPP and NPA operatives in the open mass movement. They were ludicrously blamed for the military and PNP's merciless killing of strikers at the hacienda last year. Gloria Arroyo had earlier declared the hacienda strike "a national security concern," signalling the military to launch unmitigated attacks on the legal democratic movement.

The campaign of violence now being carried out in various parts of the country is akin to the dirty tactics that butchers of the military had employed in Mindoro in previous years.

AB

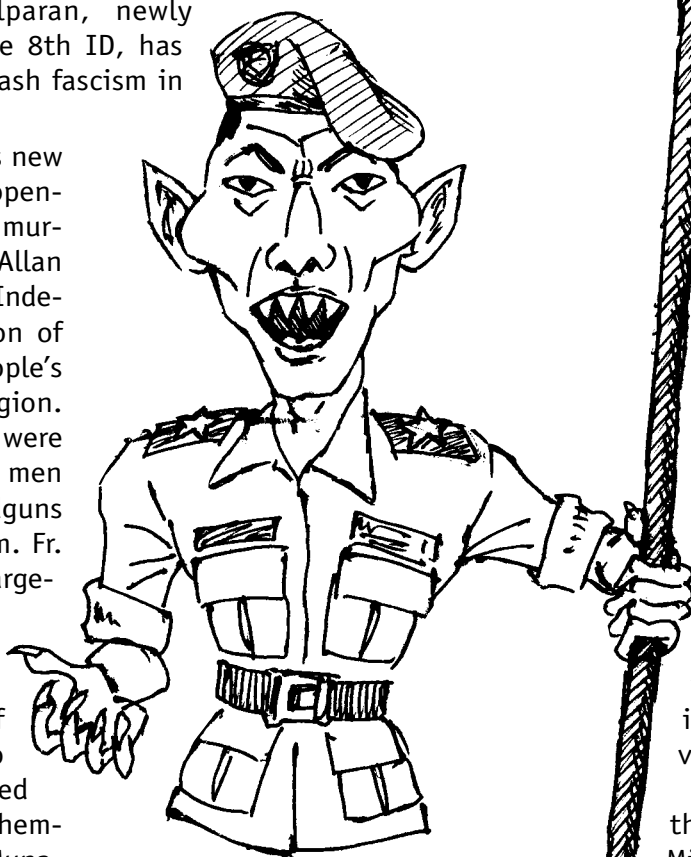
Palparan sows fascist violence in Eastern Visayas

Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan, newly appointed chief of the 8th ID, has already begun to unleash fascism in Eastern Visayas.

Barely three weeks into his new role, Palparan launched his opening salvo with the attempted murder on February 18 of Fr. Allan Caparro of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and vice chairperson of the Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR) in the region. Caparro and his wife Aileen were both wounded after three men armed with .45 caliber handguns aboard a motorcycle shot them. Fr. Caparro actively opposed large-scale mining because of the harm it would bring to the people of the region.

On March 6, a company of soldiers from the 63rd IB who even brought along an armored personnel carrier positioned themselves in front of the Bayan Muna-Northern Samar and Katungod-Eastern Visayas offices in Catarman, Northern Samar to intimidate activists opposed to intensifying militarization in Catubig and other towns of Northern Samar. When Bayan Muna Congressman Teodoro Casiño went to Catarman to press for the withdrawal of the 63rd IB troops, he was tailed by military forces on his way back to Manila.

On March 14, Atty. Felidito Dacut, Bayan Muna coordinator for Eastern Visayas was murdered. He was a human rights lawyer who defended victims of military violence in the region. Dacut had just come from the Bayan Muna office when he was shot by suspected military elements in Tacloban City. He was also the newly elected chairman of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) in Samar.



Palparan's brutal record as an officer detailed to various Philippine Army units in different regions of the Philippines is unmistakable.

As chief of the 24th IB in Central Luzon from the latter part of the 1980s to 1991, Palparan was involved in the capture and torture of peasant organizers and other activists, mass arrests and fake surrenders and in bombing a community.

In 1992, when he was transferred to Mountain Province, he was responsible for six cases of illegal arrest, five cases of harassment and one case of abduction. One person was wounded and there were two cases of forced evacuation during his watch. Sixty-one cases of human rights violations were recorded in 2001 when he

headed Task Force Banahaw in Rizal and Laguna. In less than two years as commander of the 204th Brigade in Oriental Mindoro from 2001 to 2003, up to 27 activists were killed, including mass leaders Eden Marcellana and Eddie Gumanoy.

In light of all this, the National Democratic Front (NDF) in Eastern Visayas avers that there can be no one else responsible for the further intensification of fascist violence in the region.

No less than Palparan, the so-called "butcher of Mindoro" confirms this perception. On March 5, in his first media interview as 8th ID chief, Palparan indicated what more he had in store under his term of office.

He boasted of crushing all opponents of the reactionary government—both the "armed enemies of the state" and "agitators"—in six months. He also agreed with the AFP proposal to penalize media personnel who interview persons branded as terrorists.

Palparan himself has said it: he would not differentiate between the armed and unarmed, civilians and combatants, those operating aboveground or underground. For the US-Arroyo regime, Palparan is the epitome of the barefaced fascist terrorism and repression that it would like to install. **AB**

Political assassinations, a US trademark

Political assassinations are a trademark of US imperialism's dirty tactics in its counterrevolutionary wars. When it launched its war against the Vietnamese people from 1964-75, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) also launched what it dubbed Operation Phoenix, a large-scale campaign of political assassination.

The US military maintained a list of targets for assassination: leading personalities who were influential or played a major role in the revolutionary struggle of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the People's Army and the National Liberation Front (or Viet Cong). From 1968-1971, more than 40,000 were killed under Operation Phoenix.

Today's mounting killings of leaders and members of progressive organizations in the Philippines were undoubtedly drawn by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) from doctrines taught by the CIA, if not directly from the US military through clandestine operatives and "military advisers" deployed in various AFP camps throughout the country.

A recent exposé disclosed the presence of over 70 US military officers and operatives working clandestinely in the Philippines. AB

PKM chapter established in South Quezon village

Despite relentless enemy military operations, 56 representatives of mass organizations of different sectors, including children's groups successfully held a conference to establish a Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid (PKM) chapter in a barrio in South Quezon.

The territorial Party committee appointed the PKM chapter's leadership consisting of its executive committee as well as members of the committees for organization, economy, health, defense and education.

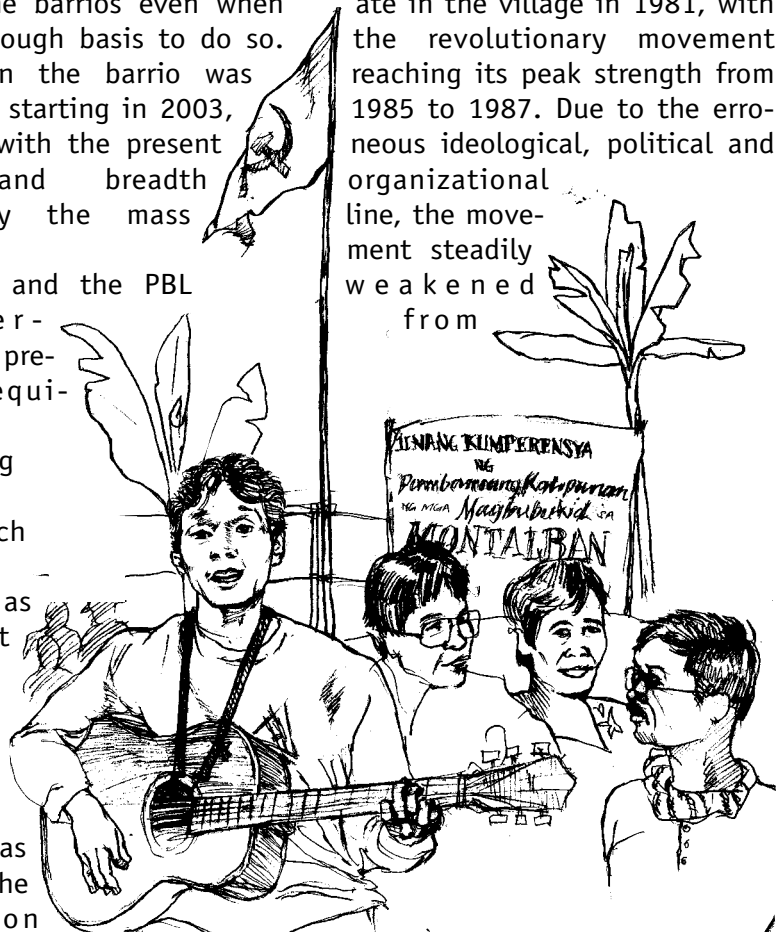
Before holding the conference, the New People's Army (NPA) and the Party branch in the locality (PBL) first went through the process of combating conservatism in mass work. Because of conservatism, it took a long time to raise the level of organization of the masses in the barrios even when there was enough basis to do so. Organizing in the barrio was given a push starting in 2003, culminating with the present strength and breadth achieved by the mass organization.

The NPA and the PBL closely cooperated in preparing the requisites for launching the conference, which had been scheduled as early as last year.

A thorough social investigation of the barrio was conducted. The investigation

revealed that the barrio was not a typical agricultural area. There were extensive coconut lands and banana plantations, interspersed with several patches of swidden farms owned by small farmers. Up to 40% of the area is classified as public land. Within the titled coconut lands usually owned by prominent families, peasants serve as tenants in charge of one to two hectares.

A more in-depth account of the barrio's revolutionary history was completed. The NPA began to operate in the village in 1981, with the revolutionary movement reaching its peak strength from 1985 to 1987. Due to the erroneous ideological, political and organizational line, the movement steadily weakened from



the latter part of 1987 to 1989. In spite of this, the mass organizations and the Party branch remained intact.

From 1990-1992, the NPA operated intermittently in the barrio. It was only in 1995 when the Red fighters were able to operate consistently. Steady recovery work in the area was carried out within the framework of the Second Great Rectification Movement.

One of the factors behind the barrio's successful recovery was the NPA's participation in production work and in encouraging *suyuan* (mutual exchange of labor) for the purpose of clearing large tracts of land for swidden farming. The villagers' earnings grew, as they slowly shifted to copra production and planting other food crops from having relied solely on selling bananas and banana blossoms (or inflorescence).

The role of organized women in consolidating the mass base and laying the foundation for the establishment of the mass organizations was likewise outstanding. Because many of the women were former members of Party branches in other barrios, they were able to help the NPA and other members of the PBL immensely in organizing and providing political education. Eventually, they were able to launch education sessions on their own without the Red fighters.

The revolutionary movement's strong influence in

the barrio is very much felt. Even members of the barangay council acknowledge the revolutionary cause. Weeding out unsavory elements and enemy agents is likewise vigorous. The people's militia and mass organizations have a well-functioning system of intelligence work and reporting that ensures the security of the NPA and the barrio. Rules for clandestine operations are strictly followed to prevent the military from arresting known members of the Party and mass organizations.

At present, more than 70% of the barrio's population is organized. Majority of the members have already finished the basic mass course. The masses have been tempered in agrarian revolution struggles and in confronting the enemy's intense military operations. The people's militia participates in tactical offensives as part of its military training.

Setting up mass organizations in the barrio is an important component in the upsurge of the revolutionary movement. As a consequence, the Party is expected to exercise more in-depth leadership, the NPA to grow in strength and the level of mass organizations to rise to a higher level. These will serve as the solid core of revolutionary advance in the face of escalating militarization and intensifying counter-revolutionary war.

AB

In Nueva Ecija

Settling disputes among the people

One of the most important matters the New People's Army (NPA) deals with on a daily basis is how to address issues or contradictions that arise among the masses and how to resolve such disputes through arbitration.

In the first week of March, *Ang Bayan* interviewed Ka Deo, a leading Party cadre in Nueva Ecija on how comrades in the province fulfill this task.

In the main, it is the people's government, Party organs and mass organizations that perform arbitration work. In Nueva Ecija today, arbitration functions are exercised by a growing number of mass organizations that implement revolutionary policies in varying degrees. In such cases, all that is left for the people's army to deliberate are issues and complaints that cannot be resolved at the mass organizations' level. However,

in areas where mass organizations are still in the formative stages, it is the NPA that directly deliberates cases for arbitration.

Like other NPA units elsewhere in the country, Ka Deo's unit deals with an assortment of issues brought before it and resolves them to the best of its ability. Aside from contradictions among the barrio-folk, the unit also deals with contradictions between the people and the landlords, and in some instances, with disputes between landlords.

The most common issues that Ka Deo's unit confronts are contradictions related to land and pro-

duction equipment among barrio-folk, neighbors or relatives. Resolving these issues is a delicate and complicated matter, especially in areas where mass organizations are still weak and the programs and campaigns to advance agrarian revolution that can provide the sufficient and necessary framework for resolving smaller contradictions have not yet made headway.

Such contradictions commonly involve the division of land and water systems, the setting up of fences between farm lands and neighboring houses and the distribution of inherited property. Aside from livelihood issues, Red fighters also deliberate on civil and criminal cases, such as petty theft, non-payment of debts, swindling and spousal and child abuse, among

others. Some issues, such as the designation of tri-cycle routes to the town centers, involve areas outside guerrilla zones.

In cases that do not involve criminal violations of the rights of others, the NPA aims for a peaceful resolution through thoroughgoing dialogue between the opposing parties. The events are first investigated, the opposing sides heard and those involved called to a face-to-face meeting. They are advised on the means of resolution and given suggestions regarding appropriate resolutions, including compensation.

On the part of Ka Deo and the members of his unit, they make an all-out effort to know everything there is to know regarding the issue and to consider all aspects. They do not harbor absolute notions about either party, nor do they always treat them equally.

Ka Deo gave as an example the division of inherited land among siblings. Although each heir has equal right to the land, Ka Deo's unit gives due consideration to each party's needs relative to that of the rest, the type of land that each of them would get and each heir's capacity to develop the land, among other issues. They explain these considerations to the opposing sides even as they emphasize compromise and cooperation.

In many instances, the opposing parties are satisfied with having had the chance to discuss and ex-

plain their side and hear out the other. Feuding neighbors, for instance, can often be happily reconciled through mutual offers of apology. Land and property can be fairly distributed and the contending parties satisfied with the resolution when they receive convincing explanations from the NPA.

In cases involving violations of human rights and revolutionary law, the necessary penalties are imposed, the entire community advised and the correct measures to prevent reoccurrence are put in place.

According to Ka Deo, the people easily accept and implement decisions arising from arbitration because of the revolutionary movement's prestige and integrity. Thus, the decisions' effectiveness and enforceability depend on the strength and determination of the people's organizations tasked with carrying them out. In some cases, however, the military and class enemies have exploited the grievances of persons dissatisfied with the results of arbitration and used them against the NPA and the revolutionary movement.

The people submit themselves to arbitration proceedings under the revolutionary movement's auspices as part of their recognition of the political power upheld by the revolutionary mass organizations and the NPA. It is a stark illustration of the people's repudiation of the reactionary judicial process. AB

Pregnancy in the people's army

Ka Aure is seven months pregnant. *Ang Bayan* interviewed her in Nueva Ecija, inside the guerrilla base of the New People's Army (NPA) platoon to which she belonged.

It is Ka Aure's first pregnancy. She is over 30 years old and it's been more than a year and a half since she and her husband started planning to have children. Thus, the couple was ecstatic upon learning of her pregnancy.

Until recently, Ka Aure belonged to a regular NPA unit in the province and actively carried out her revolutionary duties as a Red fighter.

When her pregnancy was confirmed, her unit immediately made plans to ensure her health and that of her unborn child. At the appropriate time, Ka Aure had a checkup

with a midwife ally in a nearby barrio.

In the months that followed, her unit made sure that she had checkups with a midwife or doctor. She religiously took the vitamins prescribed to her, and paid adequate and necessary attention to the kind and quantity of the food she ate. As is the practice of all units of the people's army, her meal and snack rations were doubled, something that comrades loved to tease her about.

Ka Aure says that she is thoroughly cared for and assisted not only by her comrades in the unit



but even by the Party branch and the mass organizations in the barrio. When it comes to her health and welfare, they give her twice the nurture they provide to Red fighters.

As with others who are with child, Ka Aure experienced changes in her disposition and physique. On her third month, her sense of taste changed and it became hard for her to keep down certain foods. She felt physically weak and suffered from a general lassitude, which were all part of being pregnant.

Her unit took certain steps to cope with her condition. She was assigned to work in adjacent barrios to reduce the need for long hikes. The tasks assigned to her were those that did not require her to shift base very often, such as providing political education. Her comrades also told her not to hesitate to let them know what food she liked to eat and that they'd do their best to provide them to her.

She discovered that boiled bananas and sugared water helped greatly during days when her vomiting was intense.

With the help and support of her husband and the unit to which she belonged, Ka Aure easily overcame these difficulties. And even in the hour of her greatest hesitation, she never relinquished her tasks as a cadre and a fighter.

At the time of Ka Aure's pregnancy, a vigorous mass campaign was also being launched in her unit's area of responsibility. As revolutionary work advanced in the area, she was also gradually able to cope physically.

Ka Aure is now preparing to give birth. She and her husband who is also a Red fighter, are likewise preparing for a new chapter in their lives as revolutionary parents. AB

People to oppose imperialist logging and mining

Prepare to wage *fetad* to oppose rapacious imperialist mining companies!" declared the Cordillera Peoples' Democratic Front (CPDF) to the people of the region. According to CPDF spokesperson Simon "Ka Filiw" Naogsan, *fetad* or armed actions by national minorities of the Cordillera against their tribal enemies will serve as the Cordillerans' contribution to the national campaign against the imperialist plunder of the country's natural wealth.

There is need to unify the *pa-ngat* or tribal leaders and all the people to defend ancestral lands, said Ka Filiw. Towards this end, armed fighters of the tribe may be organized as community defense units.

In a statement, Ka Filiw recounted the bitter experience of Benguet and Abra provinces with the plunder and destruction wrought by Benguet Corporation, Lepanto Mines and Philex Mines, which continue to inflict suffering on the people in the area.

These companies siphoned off superprofits even as the people lost their farm lands and livelihood, and suffer various ailments due to the toxic substances spewed by the mines. Even the local governments have not received the meager but much-vaunted revenues they were supposed to have gotten since 1992.

It is but right to hold Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and the justices of the Supreme Court accountable for the large-scale entry of plundering imperialist mining companies, Ka Filiw added.

Meanwhile, the NDF-Southern Mindanao Region (NDF-SMR) con-

demned the Arroyo regime for allowing continued large-scale logging in Mindanao and the withdrawal of the total log ban in the Caraga mountains of eastern Mindanao. According to NDF-SMR spokesperson Ka Rubi del Mundo, the Arroyo regime granted



ed permission to large logging companies like PICOP and Alcantara & Sons to plunder the island's remaining forests. She assailed as sheer deception the regime's posturing that it would put a stop to logging because of the tragedy that struck Quezon last December.

This only shows, Ka Rubi said, that Arroyo would rather allow the destruction of the forests to allow comprador-bourgeois companies to amass superprofits than safeguard the country's remaining patrimony and the interests of the greater number of people.

On the other hand, says Ka Rubi, the people's democratic government oversees an active program of protecting and revitalizing the environment for the people's benefit. AB

Rubout in Bicutan

The Arroyo regime used excessive force and violence in suppressing the prisoner revolt in Camp Bagong Diwa on March 15. Twenty-two detainees, most of them Moros accused of being Abu Sayyaf members were killed.

This, despite the fact that the prisoners were on the defensive, weak, hungry and under siege, and armed only with inferior weapons.

The Arroyo regime made sure that the known leaders of the Abu Sayyaf bandit group who were in collusion with officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) were killed in the attack directed by Gen. Angelo Reyes.

Among the dead were Abu Sayyaf leaders Alhamzer Limbong, Ghalib Andang and Nadzmie Saab-dullah who had long been in collusion with the AFP and had direct knowledge of the involvement of

high-ranking military officers in the Abu Sayyaf bandit group's criminal activities.

The detainees seized three weapons from the prison guards. Two of the latter were killed in the initial exchange of fire, a situation pounced upon by the regime to justify the extrajudicial killing of the known Abu Sayyaf leaders and the public condemnation of other Moros illegally arrested and accused of being members of the group.

The regime dismissed the issues and demands put forth by the prison uprising such as the

oppressed condition of Moro detainees and the illegal arrest of Moros in raids in Basilan as far back as 2001. Among the ordinary Moros illegally detained is a 14-year-old boy and 75-year-old Ahmad Upad, who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Upad was killed in the rubout.

Government officials claimed that the prison rebels were being intransigent in order to justify the assault by 300 PNP Special Action Force (SAF) troops, all of them armed with high-powered weapons. In about two hours, the PNP-SAF slaughtered the defenseless detainees like chickens.

Worse, the military officials faced the media and proudly proclaimed how many they had killed, as if they had the right to exterminate the prisoners. **AB**

Oil prices rise in rapid succession

The oil companies have foisted an added burden on an already suffering people. This March, the country's three biggest oil companies—Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp., Caltex Philippines Inc. and Petron Corp. and even the smaller companies like Seaoil Philippines Corp., Flying V, Unioil Petroleum Philippines Corp. and Eastern Petroleum Corp.—delivered a whammy of P2-2.50 price hikes.

Jacked-up gasoline, diesel and kerosene prices were effected through four successive 50-centavo increments (and in one instance, a P1 increment). Petron also raised the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) by P1 per kilo. Even before the price hikes this March, the oil companies had already increased prices twice in February. The fourth round of oil price hikes is scheduled before the end of the month. The price of diesel is currently P25.80 per liter and that of unleaded gasoline from P29.60 to P30.20 per liter. Gasoline prices have risen by P2 per liter and diesel and kerosene by almost P4 per liter this year.

The oil companies have invoked the higher price of Dubai crude

which now stands at \$55 per barrel. In fact, the rise and fall of crude oil prices in the world market have nothing to do with the way monopoly corporations set prices. These companies arbitrarily set prices to amass superprofits and do not even abide by their own pricing formulas. Had they done so, they would have come out overcharging the public by P6.2 billion in 2004.

The oil companies are pleased no end with the price increases that have come in rapid succession. Aside from the four oil price hikes this March, they warn of even more increases in the following months, supposedly to enable them to recoup losses of P10 per liter!

As before, the Department of Energy (DoE) has done nothing but

rationalize the jacked-up prices of oil products. Just recently, it merely requested the oil companies to effect gradual increases in the prices of oil products.

Now the DoE is conditioning the people's minds to accept an estimated P2.65 per liter hike once the value-added tax (VAT) is imposed on petroleum products. Malacañang expects to reap some P45-56 billion in taxes from the oil industry.

With the size and frequency of such price increases, the token P1 discount for diesel that public vehicles can avail of only in 250 gasoline stations (out of the total 4,000 nationwide) has been rendered meaningless.

To avoid the people's mounting anger, Gloria Arroyo has ordered a review of RA 8479 or the oil deregulation law supposedly with a view to amend it. But it is not enough to review a law that has caused the people extreme hardship. We must be rid of it and the Arroyo regime as well. **AB**

Central Luzon drivers go on strike

Jeepney, FX, van and tricycle drivers launched a transport strike in Bulacan, Pampanga, Tarlac and Quezon provinces on March 16 to protest relentless increases in the prices of petroleum products, the spiraling cost of toll fees in the North Luzon Expressway (NLEX) and the increase in the value-added tax. The rallyists also called for the junking of the oil deregulation law.

In Bulacan, it was morning when rallyists blocked the NLEX Tabang exit in Guiguinto. That day, 60% of transportation was paralyzed in the province.

In Pampanga, demonstrators gathered at the toll gate in Dau, Mabalacat and symbolically closed the NLEX.

In Tarlac, the protest paralyzed up to 98% of public transportation. According to the local chapter of the Pinag-isang Samahan ng mga Tsuper at Opereytor Nationwide (PISTON), 60% of the 15,000 tricycles plying Tarlac City's 76 communities joined the protest.

In Lucena City, there were no more passenger jeepneys plying the streets as early as 7:30 a.m.

Meanwhile, the NLEX teamed up with the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) and the regional police commands under Dir. Avelino Razon in trying to stop the protest. The transport strike succeeded anyway despite the deployment of policemen to monitor movements in Metro Manila and nearby provinces and despite Razon's order to arrest protesters at the NLEX.

NPA seizes 5 firearms in Western Samar ambush

THE Arnulfo Ortiz Command (AOC) of the New People's Army (NPA) in Western Samar seized five high-powered firearms and other military equipment in an ambush on elements of the 34th IB between Barangay Quezon, San Jorge and Barangay Palencia, Tarangnan on March 3. Two soldiers were killed and an undetermined number wounded on the enemy side, while the NPA did not sustain a single casualty. The troops were aboard a Hummer Military Vehicle when they were ambushed.

According to the AOC, the 34th IB was punished because of "continued inhumane acts of its Reengineered Special Operations Teams (RSOT)", such as setting up camps in chapels, schools and homes of civilians, harassing the barriofolk, accusing them of being NPA members, and forcing civilians to act as guides in their military operations.

Government employees stage protest

Thousands of teachers, health workers and other government employees launched a national day of protest on March 16 to demand a ₱3,000 across-the-board increase in their monthly salaries. Among the participating organizations were the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), the Alliance of Health Workers (AHW) and the All Government Employees Unity.

In Manila, thousands of government employees converged in Mendiola where they held a program. They assailed this year's recently approved ₱907.56-billion national budget for not having any provision for increasing the salaries of government employees. Meanwhile, a third of the budget will go to debt payments.

The government employees said that their pegged salaries can no longer keep up with rising prices of commodities.